

Teachers' Experiences and Views Regarding Distance Education Courses for Foreign Language Teaching at Secondary Education Level

Nahide Arslan¹

¹ Bursa Uludağ University, Institute of Education Sciences, Bursa, Turkey

Correspondence: Nahide Arslan, Bursa Uludağ University, Institute of Education Sciences, Bursa, 16159, Turkey.

Received: October 8, 2021

Accepted: December 4, 2021

Online Published: January 19, 2022

doi:10.5539/ies.v15n1p99

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v15n1p99>

Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic is a significant event for the whole world and our country. It is thought that this epidemic, which started in 2020 and whose effects continue to be felt, has negatively affected all areas of life and will continue to affect them for a long time. Countries have taken a series of measures to prevent the spread of the epidemic, and within the framework of these measures, every level and sector of education has had to switch from the face-to-face education model to distance education practices. In this context, the aim of our study is to examine the experiences and views of teachers regarding distance education courses in foreign language teaching at secondary education level and to offer suggestions for the future. The study group of the research, which was prepared within the scope of qualitative research, consists of 20 foreign language teachers, who were determined with a holistic multiple case design, one of the purposive sampling methods. A questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions was sent to the participants via WhatsApp due to the ongoing epidemic conditions, and the data obtained were subjected to content analysis. Participants stated that distance education courses were not spent productively for students, but that they could be adapted to the new order with a number of measures to be taken.

Keywords: covid-19 pandemic, distance education, foreign language courses, teachers' views

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 epidemic that we are undergoing has affected our living spaces extremely negatively and accordingly, has resulted in a series of measures being taken. In particular, it has paved the way for the emergence of innovations at every stage of education and made it necessary for existing practices to be changed in certain ways. The best example of this is the distance education model, which is implemented with an understanding and design disconnected from past practices. Today, distance education practices have emerged not as an alternative to flaws detected in face-to-face teaching environments, but entirely due to the urgent needs and requirements resulting from the epidemic.

The distance education model, which began with correspondence education in Turkey, reached wider audiences with TRT's radio and television broadcasts. On the other hand, it has been possible to access the required data easily, to facilitate international communication, and to closely follow what is happening in the world thanks to information and communication technologies. Ultimately, with the use of the internet in education, the modern distance education level was soon reached. However, today, with the effect of the Covid-19 epidemic, a new era has begun in the field of education, so that distance education has been put into practice by necessity in all official (kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, public education centres) and private institutions (driving courses, private teaching institutions and nurseries) affiliated to the Ministry of National Education, as well as state and foundation universities under the Council of Higher Education.

It is seen that many definitions of distance education have been made in the literature (Alkan, 1997; Yalın, 2004; Adıyaman, 2002; Kaya, 2002, 2006; Uşun, 2006; İşman, 2008; Schlosser & Simonson, 2009; Moore & Kearsley, 2012; Demir, 2014; Gelişli 2015; Güler, 2020; Gürer, 2021). These definitions draw attention to some points that are essentially deficient or interrupted in traditional education. For example, it is stated that distance education enables individuals who have discontinued their education for various reasons to access synchronous or asynchronous courses whenever and wherever they want. It is said that the distance education model, which removes time and space limitations, has begun to impose the understanding of lifelong education on the existing education system (Elitaş, 2018). Furthermore, it is stated that distance education allows students to learn at their own learning pace, in their preferred environment or in a more comfortable environment (Gürer, 2021), which

brings individual learning to the fore. That is, the student who realises that he/she has the responsibility of learning through distance education has the opportunity to access information and develop his/her entrepreneurial sides with this awareness (Uşun, 2006). Moreover, it is emphasised that by integrating it with the developing technologies, distance education contributes to enriching the educational processes and increasing the quality of courses.

1.1 Aim and Importance of the Study

In the epidemic process, the education system has been one of the most popular public service areas that have been most affected and for which decisions have been updated according to the course of the epidemic. Thus, the Covid-19 outbreak pioneered the experience of distance education in all its dimensions and a view of the education system from a different perspective, thanks to advanced technological tools. Among the possibilities are the ability to continue distance education for longer depending on the course of the epidemic, or to carry out improvement activities for the problems encountered in the process. Nevertheless, it is thought that the distance education model will be implemented at all levels of education and will gain even more importance in the forthcoming years. In this new era, when the use of technology is a necessity rather than a choice, this research is carried out in order to present the experiences of secondary school foreign language teachers in the distance education process and their suggestions for the future. In this context, answers to the following questions are sought:

- 1) What are the problems you have encountered in distance education courses during the Covid-19 epidemic process?
- 2) What are the aspects of distance education courses that you have found positive?
- 3) What are the process and assessment method(s) followed in measuring the objectives and course contents?
- 4) What would be your suggestions for solutions to existing problems in the event that distance education courses are re-run?

2. Method

In this study, a qualitative approach was adopted. In qualitative research, “the researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). With this approach, the experiences and views of English, French, German and Arabic teachers regarding the distance education process in foreign language teaching were taken as a basis.

2.1 Study Group

The study group of the research consists of a total 20 teachers (12 female and 8 male) working in three Anatolian High Schools during the 2020-2021 academic year. The holistic multiple case design, which is one of the purposive sampling methods, was used in sample selection. This design encompasses situations that can be perceived as holistic on their own; each case is handled holistically in its own right and then cases are compared with each other (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In the schools selected as sampling, the first foreign language is English while the second foreign language is one of the French, German and Arabic languages. Accordingly, the fact that the teachers give lessons to similar age groups at the A1-A2 level within the framework of the syllabus determined by the National Ministry of Education and that they participate voluntarily is the selection criteria of the subject. In order to protect the personal information of the participants, a coding with initial of the word “Teacher” has been made. General information about the teachers is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Information on foreign language teachers participating in study

Participant Code	Branch	Gender	Length of Service	Distance Education Experience
T1	German	Female	30 years	No
T2	German	Female	8 years	No
T3	Arabic	Female	1 year	No
T4	Arabic	Female	21 years	No
T5	Arabic	Female	23 years	No
T6	Arabic	Male	28 years	Yes
T7	French	Female	23 years	No
T8	French	Male	3 years	No
T9	English	Female	34 years	No
T10	English	Female	21 years	No
T11	English	Female	7 years	No
T12	English	Female	7 years	Yes
T13	English	Female	9 years	No
T14	English	Male	15 years	No
T15	English	Female	25 years	No
T16	English	Male	40 years	No
T17	English	Male	3 years	Yes
T18	English	Male	9 years	No
T19	English	Male	23 years	No
T20	English	Male	5 years	No

2.2 Data Collection Tool

The data of the study were collected through a questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview form was prepared following a literature review on the subject in order to ensure the validity of the data collection tool. After receiving the opinions of experts regarding the interview form, the necessary corrections were made and the questions were finalised. The data collection tool consists of a total of 9 questions, 5 of them factual aimed at the participants' gender, branch, length of service, rank and distance education experience, and 4 judgmental for the participants to express their evaluations of the distance education process. Since the research practices and data collection activities of the current study were to be carried out in schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education, applications to obtain the necessary permission were first made to the Bursa Provincial Directorate of National Education, and then to the relevant university unit, in line with the research permit circular numbered 2020/2. After obtaining the required approval, the questionnaires were sent to the teachers via WhatsApp. It was decided to implement such a method as a result of the current working situation of the researcher, the fact that the course schedules of the teachers working in the three different schools were different from each other and that therefore, they were at the schools at different times, and the fact that the idea of bringing teachers together during the epidemic was not considered appropriate. The questionnaires were sent via the aforementioned application and teachers were reminded once again that they could answer each question as they wished. The questionnaires which were completed and sent were each used as a data source in this research as a document.

2.3 Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed by means of content analysis. Content analysis is expressed as a research technique used to draw reproducible and valid conclusions from data regarding its content (Krippendorff, 1980). In analysing the data obtained for each research question, the processes of (1) coding the data, (2) finding the themes, (3) organising the codes and themes, and (4) defining and interpreting the findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 4-12; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, pp. 243-252) were followed. Accordingly, in the first stage, the data were read repeatedly with an expert who is competent in the field and then codes consisting of a few words were determined for items of interrelated data. In the second stage, the thematic coding process was carried out, which would present the concepts that emerged as a result of the data coding within a more general framework and would gather their relationships with each other in certain categories. At the end of this process, in order to strengthen the objectivity of the study and to determine whether the coding correctly represented the themes in which they were placed, the opinions of two experts were obtained. In this context, the experts were given a list of data for each research question, then asked them to code the data and to classify considering predetermined categories. It was determined that the coding and classification made by the experts were similar to those made by us. Thus, the

coding and organisation of the data according to themes was completed with a mutual agreement and presented in tables with the frequencies of use. Guba and Lincoln (1982) drew attention to the need for trustworthiness rather than validity-reliability in qualitative research. At this point, it is thought that the preparation of the data obtained by receiving feedback from experts increases credibility in terms of both reliability and confirmability.

3. Findings

In this part of the study, the findings obtained in relation to the research questions will be presented under separate headings.

3.1 Findings Related to Problems Faced by Foreign Language Teachers in Distance Education Courses

The findings related to the problems faced by foreign language teachers in the distance education process are classified under 5 themes and presented in Table 2. It was recorded that technical/technological problems are in first place with a rate of 41% (f=28), followed in second place by student-related problems with a rate of 26% (f=18), and in third place by temporal/spatial problems with a rate of 14% (f=10). It is seen finally that these are followed by parent- and teacher-related problems at similar rates (10% and 9%, respectively).

Table 2. Negative aspects of distance education

Theme	Coding	Frequency	Participant code
Technical and technological problems	Access to the internet	11	T1-T2-T4-T7-T9-T11-T12-T15-T17-T19-T20
	Communication barriers	7	T4-T7-T11-T13-T15-T18-T19
	Access to technological tools and equipment	6	T1-T3-T8-T10-T17-T20
	Systemic problems	4	T2-T6-T14-T18
Student-related problems	Students' reluctance to participate in the course	8	T1-T2-T4-T11-T12-T14-T18-T19
	Arbitrariness in participation	3	T1-T6-T20
	Low motivation	2	T18-T19
	Individual problems	2	T2-T18
	Self-discipline problems	2	T18-T19
	Reliability of feedback	1	T13
Temporal and spatial problems	Unsuitable home environment	7	T2-T3-T4-T9-T10-T14-T15
	Insufficient course hours	2	T13-T18
	Lessons held at early times	1	T9
Parent-related problems	Lack of parental interest	4	T1-T6-T8-T18
	Socio-economic problems	2	T14-T18
	Finding distance education pointless	1	T14
Teacher-related problems	Difficulty of measurement-evaluation applications	4	T3-T14-T15-T9
	Feeling of burnout	1	T2
	Lack of knowledge in the use of technological tools and equipment	1	T18

The codes that comprise the theme of technical and technological problems are access to the internet, communication barriers, access to technological tools and equipment, and systemic problems, respectively. More than half of the participants (f=11) created the first code classified under this theme by drawing attention to problems experienced in accessing the internet. While T12 expressed her view regarding internet access as “*Since not all of the students could provide internet access, connection problems were experienced in general*”, T19 shared the following opinion, which we think sums up the situation in the best way: “*Internet connection, continuity of data flow rate and device quality each constitute a problem on their own; there are frequent losses of connection and interruptions in audio and video transmission*”. Communication barriers can involve many elements that will cause negative consequences in interpersonal relationships and disrupt communication. It is seen in the literature that communication barriers are classified as personal, physical, technical, psychological, social and organisational (Sabuncuoğlu & Gümüş, 2008). Considering the views presented regarding communication barriers, which constitute the second code of this theme, T7 explained in detail the problems caused by the lack of communication and the reflections of this on language teaching by saying, “*Inability to obtain the desired level of efficiency from the reading, writing, speaking and listening activities; when we ask students a question, they hesitate when answering, even if they know the right answer, especially because*

pronunciation exercises that are done in the classroom environment cannot be carried out. There is not the same mutual interaction as there is in face-to-face education". Similarly, participant T13 expressed the lack of communication caused by physical distance with the comment, *"Inability to make eye contact with the student, inability to figure out whether he/she understands, not knowing whether he/she has taken notes or not"*.

Among the teachers who drew attention to the difficulties experienced in accessing technological tools and equipment, T10 said that *"First of all, the lack of adequate technical tools was the biggest problem for all of our students, and participation remained at a certain level"*, and stated that devices such as mobile phones, tablets and computers were not available for every student. The participant coded T17 stated that access to technological devices such as mobile phones, tablets and computers could not be fully provided in cases where there was more than one student in some houses: *"During the distance education process, students could not take part in the class due to the lack of a phone, laptop or internet. In multi-sibling houses, there was a problem of joining in live classes or continuity problems due to the lack of a telephone"*.

Regarding the systemic problems that make up the last code of this category, T2 said, *"Sometimes I had connection problems. I could not somehow access the live course on EBA from my computer. That is why I entered via my phone, which was mostly troublesome for me"*, while T18 talked about the problems that he personally experienced and that the students were also exposed to by saying, *"In other activities, it was possible for students to answer in the Chat with Zoom section, but there was no such opportunity on EBA. By the way, I also had a lot of problems in getting an appointment for the course on EBA"*.

When the theme of student-related problems, which consists of 6 codes, is examined, the reluctance to participate in classes was recorded as the problem most frequently discussed by teachers ($f=8$). In this context, T11 said, *"The students who did not want to participate in speaking activities even in the classroom environment experienced a complete unwillingness in distance education"*, while T18 explained the situation in detail with the statement, *"The students who wanted priority for the right to speak were given the opportunity first, and then those who did not take part in the lesson. But for example, sometimes there was reluctance in participation. In this case, even when I chose a student, he/she refused to take the floor, saying 'Sir, I don't want to answer!'"*. Three participants claimed that students made arbitrary decisions in taking part in the lessons. For example, T6 stated, *"Students come to class when they feel like it, and if they don't want to, they don't attend class. There is no compelling factor for the student"*, while T20 explained that *"Students exclude themselves from the class and remain passive, saying that their microphone is broken or that their camera is not working..."*. Low motivation, individual problems and self-discipline problems are each included with a frequency of two. T19 stated that the low level of student motivation stemmed from the lack of a face-to-face communication environment, saying, *"Interaction and communication between both the teacher and the students have disappeared. This has eliminated student motivation and competitive learning"*.

The participants who stated temporal and spatial problems mostly brought up the problems experienced in the home environment ($f=7$). After this came the insufficiency of course hours, followed by the lessons held in the early hours of the day. Some of the views presented are as follows: T10 stated, *"Since language teaching requires constant communication and there were students whose homes were not suitable (not having their own room, younger siblings, crowded family, etc.), there were some who did not want to turn on the microphone and begin to speak"*, while T13 said, *"Due to the limited time, the speaking parts were done less often, and the writing sections were hardly ever done"*. In T18's opinion, *"I have to say that I had difficulty in doing the speaking and listening activities among the four basic language skills because time was very short; we were never able to do the writing activities, but I can say that we did the reading activities best"*.

In the category of parent-related problems, parental indifference was the issue most frequently mentioned ($f=4$). This was followed by socio-economic conditions with a frequency of 2, while in last place, it was stated by one participant that distance education was not considered beneficial in the eyes of parents. On this point, T1 reproachfully said, *"The most important deficiency is the parents! When they were told that the student did not attend the lesson, they did not really care"*, while T8 commented that *"It was determined that while parental follow-up should have increased, it did in fact decrease"*. While T18 emphasised financial hardship by saying *"I observed that some parents had difficulties in obtaining the necessary tools and equipment due to financial problems"*, T14 shared his opinion that distance education was not supported on the grounds that *"the benefit was also regarded as low by parents"*.

The last category is teacher-related problems and consists of three codes. In this category, it is seen that the difficulty of measurement-evaluation applications was mostly touched upon with a frequency of 4. For example, the problems experienced were expressed by T3 as *"The individual evaluation and orientation of students was not*

completely successful” and by T15 as “The opportunity to ask questions to each student was limited and assessment-evaluation control was difficult in classes attended by the majority of the students due to crowded classrooms”. Furthermore, T18 explained the difficulty he experienced in using technological devices by saying, “As a teacher, I also had a lot of problems mainly in understanding the situation and in using these tools”, while T2 confessed her psychological state with these words: “In this process, I frankly became alienated from my profession; it felt like I was lecturing to the wall most of the time”.

3.2 Findings Related to Positive Aspects of Distance Education Courses

In Table 3, it can be seen that the positive views regarding distance education courses are classified under 5 themes, as with the negative opinions. It was observed that distance education courses were found to be most beneficial for students with a rate of 40% (f=16). This was followed by the functioning of the course with a rate of 28% (f=11), while it is seen that there were common views regarding teachers and students with a rate of 20% (f=8). In the last place, the views related to teachers and parents were at the same rate (6%-f=2).

Table 3. Positive aspects of distance education

Theme	Coding	Frequency	Participant code
In terms of the student	A completely learning-oriented process	8	T3-T5-T6-T7-T9-T10-T15-T17
	Compensating for deficient outcomes	4	T1-T10-T12-T13
	Fostering individual responsibility and self-discipline	4	T6-T17-T18-T19
In terms of the functioning of the course	Richness of material and diversity in activities	5	T8-T10-T11-T18-T20
	Time saving in in-class activities	4	T7-T11-T15-T20
	Flexibility in the learning process	2	T7-T10
In terms of the teacher and student	Providing a safer environment	4	T4-T10-T11-T16
	Saving time in travelling to and from school	2	T2-T10
	Preventing the spread of the pandemic	2	T1-T14
In terms of the teacher	Self-development	1	T1
	Lack of discipline problems	1	T10
In terms of the parent	Financial relief	1	T2
	Parents' ease of access to meetings	1	T10

It is seen that the first category, which is formed in relation to finding the distance education process beneficial mostly for students, comprises a completely learning-oriented process, compensating for deficient outcomes, and fostering individual responsibility and self-discipline. Most participants (f=8) formed the first code in this category by expressing that distance education is a completely learning-oriented process. Participants stated that distance education courses are a good opportunity for really interested students to educate themselves. Furthermore, there were also views to the effect that the quality of the courses increases significantly when there is a small number of participants and that they even have the quality of private lessons. T3 stated that “It was a learning-oriented process. It enabled students to educate themselves better by avoiding the distractions that exist at school”, while in T9’s opinion, “For students who really attend the lesson for learning purposes, the lesson can be more productive, and sometimes it can have the quality of a one-on-one lesson”. Four participants commented that distance education is more beneficial than face-to-face education in enabling students to make up for deficient outcomes and complete the content in the curriculum. Moreover, some participants completed this theme by presenting views drawing attention to the fact that a number of skills that should be fostered in students gained more importance in this period. In this context, fostering individual responsibility and self-discipline constitutes the final code. T18 commented that “It fostered a culture and discipline of individual learning in the students”, while T19 stated that “This process showed the students that individual responsibility and discipline are much more important in learning. Individual learning came to the fore. Distance education has fostered a new learning habit.”

The positive aspects of distance education regarding the functioning of the course in the teaching process consist of three coding. Five participants drew attention to the importance of written, visual and audio materials used in distance education courses, and stated that the inclusion of multimedia materials in the course provided diversity in

terms of methods and techniques, and that the activities that were done enriched the courses. In this context, T10 presented his view in detail by saying, *“Everything was at hand, since I entered the remote lessons from the desktop computer. The windows, which I prepared by opening different materials, the instant screen display, sound, etc., the ease of transmission, and the practicality were nice. It was also nice to research anything that came to our mind at that moment during the lesson and project it on the screen immediately”*. Four participants pointed out that thanks to distance education, time was saved in in-class activities. For example, T7 said, *“Distance education eliminates the time problem”*, while T11 reported, *“I saved time because I already have to use smart boards all the time due to our branch”*. Two participants expressed that distance education courses provide flexibility in the learning process as follows: T7 stated that *“It provides ease of access when required. It allows for repetition”*, while in T10’s view, *“Also, it was possible to hold extra lessons and meetings with students via Zoom when necessary. Even if our students were uncomfortable, they were able to participate from their homes and did not miss the classes”*.

As a result of the examination of the data revealing that distance education is advantageous for both teachers and students, codes for providing a safer environment, saving time in travelling to and from school, and preventing the spread of the epidemic also emerged. In this context, the first coding was created by four participants who stated that during the epidemic, distance education lessons conducted at home were safer than the school environment. T10 was of the opinion that *“Even the weather conditions can be a problem in face-to-face education. For example, in hot weather, there were no conditions for students to listen to the lesson or for the teacher to teach comfortably in crowded classrooms, but we can arrange the conditions in the most ideal way in our own home”*, while T16 explained that some students who experience communication barriers in the traditional face-to-face teaching environment overcome this shyness in their own home environment, saying, *“I observed that the shyness of the students in class was absent in online education”*. The comments in which participants stated that time is saved in travelling to and from school are recorded as follows: T2 stated that *“The positive aspect I find is that neither we nor the students took to the streets, and so loss of time during the day was prevented”* and T10 reported, *“Because we didn’t spend time travelling to and from school, it was nice to use this time for preparation for lessons. We had more time left to prepare for the lessons”*. Two other participants stated that distance education at home eliminates the risk of transmission of the virus.

The aspects of the distance education courses that were found to be beneficial only for the teachers were explained with two codes. The first is the improvement of the aspects that teachers saw as lacking in themselves, and the other is the removal of the discipline problem. In this direction, T1 commented, *“At the same time, this process enabled us to improve ourselves in the areas we were deficient in”*, while T10 stated, *“Especially crowded classrooms and discipline problems could be very annoying in face-to-face education, but these were not a problem in distance education and I found the opportunity to conduct the lessons in a more lesson-oriented, uninterrupted and fluent way”*.

The last category concerns parents. In this regard, the participants presented views expressing that this process both relieves the parents financially and that it is easier to participate in parents’ meetings than at normal times. T2 stated that *“The students’ financial expenditures have decreased, and the burden of the family may also have decreased in this sense”*, while in T10’s view, *“Again, holding parents’ meetings via Zoom was good in terms of making parent participation practical. The usual excuses like ‘I’m working’, ‘I’m busy’, etc. were thus eliminated”*.

3.3 Process and Methods Followed for Measuring Outcomes in the Distance Education Process

In Table 4, it is seen that the data obtained regarding the third research question (the process/methods followed for measuring outcomes in the distance education process) are gathered under 6 coding.

Table 4. Methods implemented for measuring outcomes

Coding	Frequency	Participant Code
Questions-answers in class	10	T3-T6-T7-T9-T12-T13-T14-T16-T17-T20
Activities via different applications	7	T4-T7-T8-T10-T15-T16-T20
Activities via EBA	5	T4-T8-T9-T15-T18
Active participation/attendance in class	5	T5-T6-T10-T11-T19
Activities of web-based educational sites	2	T1-T18
Exams held in line with the decisions of the Ministry of Education	2	T2-T11

It is seen that the question-answer technique was mostly used in distance education foreign language courses with

a frequency of 10. It is observed that this is followed by the activities sent via WhatsApp, Google Meet and email with a frequency of 7, while this is followed by activities sent via EBA and processes based on active participation and attendance in class, both with frequencies of 5. Finally, it is seen that participants utilised the activities of web-based educational sites and that some participants only held exams in line with the decisions of the Ministry of National Education, each with a frequency of 2. On this point, the opinion of the participant coded T2 is quite interesting and thought-provoking: *“Frankly, we couldn’t find students to measure outcomes. I conducted lessons with a maximum of 13 students. I held exams only in line with the requests of the Ministry of Education. Although I gave homework, not many people responded”*.

3.4 Suggestions Offered Regarding Solutions to Problems Encountered in the Distance Education Process

13 coding were made with the data obtained in line with the solution of problems encountered in the distance education process, and these codes are presented in Table 5 under five themes. Accordingly, it was determined that foreign language teachers offered suggestions regarding the efficient teaching of the lessons and technical/technological problems at equal and the highest rates (36%-f=13). This ranking was followed by the responsibilities of students and parents with a rate of 17% (f=6), followed by suggestions on measurement and evaluation with a rate of 8% (f=3) and finally, a suggestion specific to the Ministry of National Education was made with a rate of 3% (f=1).

Table 5. Suggestions for prospective distance education courses

Theme	Coding	Frequency	Participant code
For the efficient teaching of lessons	Making course attendance compulsory	8	T2-T6-T7-T11-T12-T17-T18-19
	Students’ turning on the camera in the lesson	3	T6-T13-T18
	Making EBA support points compulsory	2	T8-T17
For technical/technological problems	Improvement of internet infrastructure throughout the country	5	T1-T10-T11-T18-T19
	Improvement of technological tools and equipment	2	T1- T19
	Online sourcing of audio-visual materials	2	T8-T16
	Supply of computers and tablets to students in need	2	T5-T10
	A system showing that the lessons are written in the book and notebook	1	T18
	Setting up an attendance system	1	T13
For students and parents	Full participation of parents and students in the process	6	T3-T7-T8-T13-T18-T20
For measurement/evaluation	Conducting exams from a single centre	2	T9-T15
	Rearrangement for oral grades	1	T15
For the Ministry of Education	Preparation of a consistent curriculum at the beginning of the semester	1	T14

Suggestions offered in terms of efficient teaching of the lessons are given under three headings. The first code is related to the problem of students not being able to access the courses, which some participants had mentioned before (f=8). In this direction, T2 said, *“Students should be obliged to take part in classes, just like in normal school times. Or else, there should be a cost for not coming to the class; some things have to be accounted for”*, while T17 commented that *“Since there is no obligation to attend classes, students’ participation in classes is low, and so attendance should be made compulsory”*. The participant with the code T12, who had negative opinions about distance education courses, said, *“Because I don’t think that distance education provides efficiency, frankly, I do not have radical solutions for the problems. However, I think that the participation of all students will make the courses more workable”*. While three participants suggested that students should turn on the camera in the lesson, two participants suggested that EBA support points should be made compulsory for students who did not have the opportunity and that serious sanctions should be applied on this point.

Suggestions for technical and technological problems consist of six codes. The assessments of 5 participants on the need to improve the internet infrastructure throughout the country constitute the first code in this category. Two participants stated that technological tools and equipment have an important place in distance education courses

and that the applications used should be reviewed in such a way as to ensure student-teacher interaction. On this point, T19 shared his opinion that *“In the event of further development of interaction and mutual applications and interfaces (sound, image and text) and arranging the programmes and developing the materials to allow for pair and group work, online education will be more successful than face-to-face courses in foreign language education as well as in many other courses”*. On the other hand, two participants emphasised that more use should be made of audio-visual materials in order for foreign language courses to be more productive and even that teachers should establish a resource creation unit and support the lessons in this direction. Two other participants, however, stated that the Ministry should make more effective decisions and put them into practice as soon as possible regarding the supply of tools such as mobile phones, tablets and computers to students in need, thus increasing participation in classes. Moreover, the assessments that make up the last codes of this theme with frequencies of one each also draw attention. Namely, T18 and T13 touched on another dimension of physical and active participation in classes, stating that *“A system should be established by which we can see that the lessons are written in the book and notebook”*, and *“An automatic attendance system should be planned”*, respectively.

Another issue for which the participants offered suggestions in this process was to inform parents as well as students on a regular basis, both to ensure more participation in the lessons and to access documents that may be useful to students ($f=6$). Furthermore, it is seen that two participants had suggestions for conducting exams from a single centre and giving performance grades with at least 50% EBA activities. In the last theme, one participant made a proposal for clear decisions to be made about which curriculum to implement at the beginning of the term and for it to be implemented in a consistent manner.

4. Discussion and Suggestions

The data obtained in our study reveal that distance education courses are generally not efficient and the negatives aspects are more than those of positive. The participants, who stated that the current problems occur in foreign language courses just as they do in all courses, emphasised that the activities that should be implemented to develop especially basic and complementary language skills could not be carried out efficiently. To put it more clearly, it was stated that the language courses, which are held within the framework of a systematic programme in the face-to-face teaching environment, could not be carried out at the targeted level due to the communication barriers created by technical problems in the distance education process, and that they even led to inequalities in education to a large extent. The findings of some studies conducted in this context (Yazıcı, Altaş, & Demiray, 2001; Bilgiç & Tüzün, 2015; Akkuş & Acar, 2017; Tümen Akyıldız, 2020) support the results of the current study. On this point, Kaya (2002) pointed out that the communication technologies used in distance learning environments contribute to communication, but that the richness of communication enabled by face-to-face communication cannot be achieved.

Foreign language teaching necessitates the teaching of language skills to an equal degree and in an integrated way in line with the new approaches adopted. The development of such skills appears possible with a continuous communication and interaction environment. However, the data obtained reveal that this environment could not be created in language teaching courses. For example, the participants stated that they could not do speaking and listening activities, or that they did them less, due to the limited duration of the lesson, and that they could only send audio files with different applications, especially for activities aimed at improving listening skills. It was stated that writing activities were hardly ever done, but that there were no problems related to conducting reading activities. In terms of complementary skills, they pointed out that there was no problem in the teaching of grammar topics and activities, whereas big problems occurred in carrying out studies on the recognition of sounds and their correct pronunciation (phonetics). The reason for this was explained as the fact that the required interaction and communication environment could not be realised in the same way as in face-to-face education, and that listening and pronunciation activities could not be performed at the desired level. Some participants attributed this to the unsuitable home environment; it was concluded that students whose homes were not physically suitable could not turn on the microphone even though they wanted to, so that effective participation in the lesson could not be achieved. This result shows parallelism with the finding in the study by Dolmacı and Dolmacı (2020) that the learning of listening and speaking skills was not effective, but it does not show parallelism with the finding related to writing skills. Besides this, the findings of our study stating that activities related to reading skills were effective are in line with the aforementioned study.

In the current study, internet access and connection problems were recorded as the most basic problem. It is seen that the problems arising from access to the internet were gathered on three axes among the views presented. The first was that the internet connection could not be reached due to the inadequate infrastructure in the areas of residence, while the second was that the financial situation of some families was insufficient to meet the high cost of the technology and devices required for accessing distance education, even if the infrastructure was adequate.

Thirdly, disruptions occurred from time to time, even in homes with a connection, due to low internet speed. Moreover, it is known that this speed decreases even more when simultaneous internet access is made with more than one mobile phone, tablet or computer. In this context, the results of the study in which the *comparethemarket.com* website examined the internet access of 35 countries that are members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in terms of different variables, in a way reveal where Turkey's current connection problems originate from, because in the research published by the site, Turkey was ranked last in the list as the country with the lowest internet speed among the member countries (Global Broadband Index, 2020).

The participants stated that student-related problems consisted of many factors and that among them, student reluctance was the most common. In addition, low motivation, individual problems and self-discipline problems were other issues mentioned by the participants. We think that these problems stem from the fact that students do not know how to learn individually, as Tümen Akyıldız (2020) also states. That is to say, the fact that students coming from a traditional teaching process based on a social environment and textbooks have to get used to the new order created by such an epidemic, and have to cope with self-learning practices, causes such problems to occur. Furthermore, some teachers also claimed that students were able to make arbitrary decisions about participation in lessons. Another striking finding in the category of problems experienced in the distance education process is that parents were indifferent to this process and were inadequate in providing the necessary attention and care for their children. Since an extraordinary process is the case, it has been concluded that in this period, parental follow-up should increase and that parents should give the necessary importance to meetings. It is also very thought-provoking that one participant stated that she became alienated from her profession due to the insufficient participation of the students. In this context, this finding made in the study confirms the relationship between student and teacher motivation revealed by Meşe and Sevilen (2021), since, referring to Dörnyei (1994), the researchers drew attention to the fact that motivation is one of the most important aspects of foreign language learning and that any threat to student motivation causes problems for learning efficiency and therefore for the teacher.

Despite a series of problems encountered in foreign language courses conducted with distance education, it was determined that most of the participants agreed that distance education courses are a learning-oriented process for really conscious and disciplined students. With the distance education model, the student, who acts with the awareness that the responsibility for learning is his/her own, also has the opportunity with this awareness to access information and develop his/her entrepreneurial sides (Uşun, 2006). Participants stated that with the active use of different technologies and methods, foreign language teaching was carried out more effectively and productively, that they were able to save time in the lesson, and that in this way, they found the opportunity to do more activities.

The foreign language teachers mostly used the question-answer technique to measure the targeted outcomes in the distance education process. On the other hand, it was observed that they continued the education process outside class through various information and communication technologies such as WhatsApp, Google Meet and email, while some participants offered the students the opportunity to access the desired content at any time, they wished by uploading videos containing lectures, related questions and test exercises via EBA. However, most of the participants stated that the evaluation process for the outcomes could not be carried out effectively or according to the purpose.

It was determined that the participants' suggestions for solving the problems encountered in the distance education process were mostly and equally related to the teaching of the courses and to technical problems. It was emphasised that participation in classes should not be left to the students' initiative but should be completely compulsory. In addition, it was recommended that the internet infrastructure should be improved and that students should turn on a webcam in the lesson in the same way as their teachers.

The suggestions obtained from the research findings are instead to eliminate the negative aspects of distance education compared to face-to-face teaching and provide a more effective and efficient learning environment in every aspect. However, due to the subject of our research, it is thought that the suggestions presented below will be helpful in terms of completing the current ones in foreign language teaching. Here are the recommendations:

- Teachers must prioritize supporting materials for individual learning in foreign language teaching;
- Extensive and varied exercises through different methods or platforms to improve the teaching of the four basic language skills and complementary ones in foreign language teaching should be sent to students;
- Students should be directed to different resources for extracurricular activities, especially for writing and speaking activities, which are stated to be performed less frequently;

- A series of applications that will facilitate activities such as group work, interaction, and active participation should be launched with the support of students.

5. Conclusion

The views and suggestions of foreign language teachers teaching at secondary education level regarding distance education courses during the Covid-19 epidemic reveal the general situation of the groups participating in the current study. With studies to be carried out in different cities and with different sample groups, this situation will undoubtedly bring up other revelations and deficiencies. In this context, it is thought that it will be beneficial to conduct such research studies in terms of complementing our study by offering suggestions for different approaches that will have a positive effect on the quality of distance education.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the foreign language teachers who contributed to the study's realization by voluntarily sharing their opinions and experiences. In addition, I would like to express my sincere thanks to my esteemed teachers, Prof. Dr. Erdoğan KARTAL and Prof. Dr. Şükrü ADA, from Bursa Uludağ University.

References

- Adıyaman, Z. (2002). Uzaktan eğitim yoluyla yabancı dil öğretimi. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology-TOJET (October)*, 1(1), 92-97.
- Akkuş, İ., & Acar, S. (2017). A research on determining the effect of technical problems in simultaneous learning environments on teachers and learners. *İnönü University Journal of the Faculty of Education*, 18(3), 363-376. <https://doi.org/10.17753/Ekev660>
- Alkan, C. (1981). *Açıköğretim: Uzaktan eğitim sistemlerinin karşılaştırmalı olarak incelenmesi*. Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi.
- Alkan, C. (1997). *Eğitim teknolojisi* (5. baskı). Ankara: Anı.
- Bilgiç, H. G., & Tüzün, H. (2015). Yükseköğretim kurumları web tabanlı uzaktan eğitim programlarında yaşanan sorunlar. *Açıköğretim Uygulamaları ve Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 1(3), 26-50.
- Comparethemarket. (2020). *Global Broadband Index 2020* [Survey results]. Retrieved from <https://www.comparethemarket.com/broadband/content/global-broadband-index/>
- Demir, E. (2014). Uzaktan eğitime genel bir bakış. *Dumlupınar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 39, 203-211.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.) (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Dolmacı, M., & Dolmacı, A. (2020). Eş zamanlı uzaktan eğitimle yabancı dil öğretiminde öğretim elemanlarının görüşleri: Bir Covid 19 örneği. *Türk Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi*, 18(2), 706-732. <https://doi.org/10.37217/tebd.783986>
- Dörnyei, Z. (1994). Motivation and motivating in the foreign language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 78(3), 273-284. <https://doi.org/10.2307/330107>
- Elitaş, T. (2018). *Uzaktan eğitim ve iletişim teknolojileri*. İstanbul: Cinius.
- Gelişli, Y. (2015). Uzaktan eğitimde öğretmen yetiştirme uygulamaları: Tarihçe ve gelişim. *Eğitim ve Öğretim Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 4(3), 313-321.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1982). Epistemological and methodological bases of naturalistic inquiry. *ECTJ*, 30, 233-252. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02765185>
- Güler, Ç. (2020). Uzaktan eğitimde öğrenmeyi yakınlaştırmak. In F. Tanhan, & H. İ. Özok (Eds.), *Pandemi ve eğitim* (pp. 281-292). Ankara: Anı.
- Gürer, M. D. (2021). Açık ve uzaktan öğrenmenin temelleri. In E. Tekinarslan, & M. D. Gürer (Eds.), *Açık ve uzaktan öğrenme* (4th ed., pp. 3-28). Ankara: Pegem Akademi. <https://doi.org/10.14527/9786052412411.01>
- İşman, A. (2008). *Uzaktan eğitim*. Ankara: Pegem Akademi.
- Kaya, Z. (2002). *Uzaktan eğitim*. Ankara: Pegem Akademi.
- Krippendorff, K. (1980). *Content Analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage.
- Meşe, E., & Sevilen, Ç. (2021). Factors influencing EFL students' motivation in online learning: A qualitative

- case study. *Journal of Educational Technology & Online Learning*, 4(1), 11-22. <http://doi.org/10.31681/jetol.817680>
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage.
- Moore, M. G., & Kearsley, G. (2011). *Distance education: A systems view of online learning* (3rd ed.). USA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Sabuncuoğlu, Z., & Gümüş, M. (2008). *Örgütlerde iletişim*. Istanbul: Arıkan.
- Schlosser, A. L., & Simonson, R. M. (2009). *Distance education: Definitions and glossary of terms* (2nd ed.). USA: Information Age.
- Tümen Akyıldız, S. (2020). Pandemi döneminde yapılan uzaktan eğitim çalışmalarıyla ilgili İngilizce öğretmenlerinin görüşleri (bir odak grup tartışması). *RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 21(Aralık), 679-696. <https://doi.org/10.29000/rumelide.835811>
- Uşun, S. (2006). *Uzaktan eğitim*. Ankara: Nobel.
- Yalın, H. İ. (2004). *Öğretim teknolojileri ve materyal geliştirme*. Ankara: Nobel.
- Yazıcı, A., Altaş, I., & Demiray, U. (2001). Distance education on the net: A model for developing countries. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE*, 2(2), 24-35.
- Yıldırım, A., & Şimşek, H. (2018). *Sosyal bilimlerde nitel araştırma yöntemleri* (11. baskı). Ankara: Seçkin. <https://doi.org/10.18020/kesit.1279>

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).